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Defense Industry Leaders Hold Candid Panel Discussion for NPS Students

MC2 Nathan K. Serpico | September 6, 2018



Senior defense industry leaders gathered at NPS for a candid panel discussion on the challenges of acquisition from the industry perspective.

Senior defense industry leaders gathered on the campus of the Naval Postgraduate School, Aug. 22, to sit down for a candid panel discussion session themed, “American National Security in an Era of Great Power Competition.”

The open discussion and Q&A session, held in conjunction with the NPS Foundation's America's Heroes Charity Golf Tournament, provides NPS students and faculty with an insider's view of the defense industry and the challenges of acquisition from the other side of the table.

"Our idea in developing this panel was to expose our students, and even faculty, to how business is done in the civilian industry world," said retired Rear Adm. Jerry Ellis, Undersea Warfare Chair at NPS and moderator for the event. "They are running a business and trying to make money, which is a different mindset from our collective military environment.

"I think [the audience] got a better idea of these leaders' mentalities through a two-way, or in this case five-way, discussion because the back and forth can spark an idea that may not have been brought up with a one-way presentation," Ellis added.

Speakers on the panel included Mike Petters, President/CEO of Huntington Ingalls Industries; Jerry DeMuro, President/CEO of BAE Systems, Inc.; retired Vice Adm. David Buss, President of Cubic Global Defense and Senior Vice President of Cubic Corporation; retired Lt. Gen. Robert Durbin, Chief Operating Officer, Aerospace Industries Association; and retired Rear Adm. Jim Green, NPS Acquisition Chair.

And although each leader brought a different set of experiences and perspectives, they all recognized the common theme of the discussion.

"I think the important aspects of what we are all about today is to help the students gain an appreciation for acquisition and acquisition policy," said Durbin. "The manner in which the Department of Defense goes through buying habits, policies and procedures, how requirements are generated, and the manner in which they turn into a contracting vehicle that allow capabilities to be produced and delivered to the warfighter ... This is the general business that we all share.

"We have some very renown leaders of industry here and I'm honored to participate in this discussion with them," Durbin continued.

Panel discussions progressed sparked by several prepared questions, with each panelist allowed several minutes to offer their own views to the student-audience. In the end, the value of the perspectives was not lost on the officers in attendance.

"I feel that this panel discussion setting is very beneficial because it allows the panel members to speak freely, so the students can hear what they actually think," said NPS student Lt. Josh Seagrave. "It also helps to give a broader response to any of the questions because it is likely that panel members will have differing opinions and each panelist has the means to break down why they think a certain way instead of just putting out information with no further detail."

The discussion ended with a question and answer session for students and faculty in the audience.

“[The discussion was] very successful and it’s definitely good for the school,” said Ellis. “I think it’s also good for industry to come here to answer questions that students have, since there is a good chance that these are some of the people they will be working with in the future.”

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